

## JOHN ABBOT'S LONDON YEARS

## PART I

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“. . . the well-earned meed of praise must not, cannot be withheld, from those worthy and indefatigable naturalists, who, impelled by an ardent love of science, became voluntary exiles from home and all its sweets, and subjected themselves to years of labour and peril, in personal efforts to examine and illustrate the natural history of this extensive Western empire." – Alexander Wilson, *American Ornithology* (1808-1814). 3: viii, citing as examples John Abbot, André Michaux, and F. A. Michaux.

The English naturalist John Abbot (1751-1840?) is now best known to entomologists and historians for his collaboration with the botanist Sir James Edward Smith. Abbot furnished materials which were edited and amplified by Smith, and published by him in the earliest extensive monograph entirely devoted to North American entomology, *The Natural History of the Rarer Lepidopterous Insects of Georgia* (1797).<sup>1</sup> After emigrating to the American colonies in 1773, Abbot provided specimens and watercolours of insects, related arthropods, and birds to a number of correspondents in Britain and Europe, and found willing customers in America. William Swainson, who praised Abbot's insects as "certainly the finest that have ever been transmitted as articles of commerce to this country," described the watercolours as "so beautifully chaste and wonderfully correct, that they were coveted by every one."<sup>2</sup> As an entomological illustrator Abbot had few contemporary equals; his work has been compared favourably to that of A. J. Roesel von Rosenhof and J. C. Sepp. His specimens from Georgia and surrounding areas, which were sought by the owners of many British and European cabinets, were described by a number of authors. The insects figured by Thomas Martyn in *Psyche* (1797) as from "New Georgia" were Abbot's. His drawings and data were used by Boisduval and LeConte in their *Histoire Générale et Iconographie des Lépidoptères et des Chenilles de l'Amérique Septentrionale* (1829-1833 [-1837]). Many descriptions of arachnids in the first two volumes (1837, 1841) of C. A. Walckenaer's *Histoire Naturelle des Insectes Aptères* were based on Abbot's watercolours and notes.

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## CAPTION TO PORTRAIT

John Abbot. From a watercolour, traditionally assumed to be a self-portrait, in John Francillon's collection of Abbot's drawings and notes, now in the Zoological Library, British Museum (Natural History). A proof in the author's collection of the George Willis copy, printed in colour by Julius Bein & Co. as the frontispiece to the first volume of Samuel H. Scudder's *The Butterflies of the Eastern United States and Canada* (1889).



John Latham cited Abbot's ornithological data in the second supplement (1801) to *A General Synopsis of Birds*, and made frequent use of materials received from Abbot in *A General History of Birds* (1821-1828). Alexander Wilson, who sought out the naturalist and obtained specimens from him, utilized his observations in the *American Ornithology* (1808-1814), completed by another of Abbot's correspondents, George Ord. In the nineteenth century Abbot collected plants for botanist friends and assembled native herbaria for customers.

Despite his many contributions to science, relatively little has been written about John Abbot except brief articles, some unfortunately replete with errors. Perhaps the problem has been the elusive nature of Abbot's life. He published nothing alone; his data remained in manuscript unless printed by others; much of his life was spent in rural isolation, and even the year of his death is unknown.<sup>3</sup> He has not been the ideal subject for those historians of natural history who have preferred to record the accomplishments of men who themselves wrote and published. Discussing the eighteenth-century English entomologist Joseph Dandridge, David E. Allen defined the tradition: "Due to the fact that he left no printed works, his existence has been almost totally overlooked — so complete has been the dominance of the subject by bibliophiles and book-listers."<sup>4</sup>

Assuredly Abbot has fared better than Dandridge, but those who would follow his work must still go to the manuscript sources. Many of these have been destroyed, such as the papers and other materials he owned at the end of his life,<sup>5</sup> yet enough of his correspondence, notes and drawings have survived to indicate that he was far more than a collector and illustrator. Abbot was a highly accomplished field naturalist, the first to make really extensive observations of a wide variety of North American insects and other arthropods, studying their life histories and habits, while giving a surprising amount of attention to lesser-known orders. Similarly, his ornithological work reveals that he was the most significant field observer of North American birds before Alexander Wilson.

Abbot's American experience was important to his development as a naturalist, but it was in London, where he was born, that the course of his future activities was determined, and it was in and near the metropolis that he acquired the skills which would enable his success as an interpreter of nature. In his youth and as a young man Abbot was an eager participant during a period of vigorous and creative growth of natural history activity in Britain. He was stimulated by his experiences among the London naturalists to forsake a comfortable future in law and seek a less certain but more rewarding life in science.

The most important of many sources which reveal the substance of Abbot's London years are two unpublished sets of his very early,

annotated entomological watercolours at the Houghton Library, Harvard University, and the Carnegie Museum of Natural History, Pittsburgh (cited respectively, with sheet numbers, as H and C),<sup>6</sup> and a brief, incomplete manuscript, "Notes on my Life" (cited as N), located at the Museum of Comparative Zoology, Harvard.<sup>7</sup> Although Abbot's reminiscences were written when he was eighty-two, and so include the occasional errors which one might expect from an old man trying to recall events distant in time, the "Notes" provide much information about his early life which would otherwise have been lost.

### I. Abbot's youth and introduction to entomology

Abbot was named after his father, the successful attorney John Abbot, who married Ann Clousinger on 16 April 1749.<sup>8</sup> Their first child died before the birth of the second, John the naturalist, which occurred on 1 June 1751 by his own account, or on 31 May according to the records of his parish church, St. George, Hanover Square.<sup>9</sup> The family lived in fashionable Bennet Street, St. James, while renting a comfortable country residence at Turnham Green, then five miles from the rapidly expanding urban area. Eventually young John had two sisters, Elizabeth and Charlotte, and a brother, Thomas.<sup>10</sup> He was tutored at home, and his precocious interests in reading and art were nurtured by attentive parents. Abbot later recalled that he "had a very early love for Books," spending much of his pocket money for them. A youthful "taste for drawing" was stimulated by his father's large and valuable collection of prints, "of some of the best Masters, he had also many good paintings" (N).

Abbot had a "peculiar liking for Insects" long before he knew how to capture and preserve them. He remembered "knocking down a Libella," a dragonfly, and pinning it, then being told that "it wou'd sting, as bad as a Rattlesnake bite."<sup>11</sup> The Turnham Green house became the site of tentative attempts at rearing, which, like other eighteenth-century naturalists, Abbot termed "breeding." He admitted that at the time he knew "no method of keeping" the imagos when he succeeded (N). Despite his parents' generosity, he had obviously not acquired the most recent guide to the British Lepidoptera, Benjamin Wilkes' *The English Moths and Butterflies* [1747 or 1748?-1749], which would have provided rudimentary instructions for capturing insects and making a collection, as well as much other useful information.<sup>12</sup> The first entomological book specifically traceable to Abbot's youthful library is Eleazar Albin's *A Natural History of English Insects* (editions from 1720 to 1749), mentioned in the "Notes," but he appears to have purchased his copy of Albin somewhat later, after he had started to collect more knowledgeably and in earnest.<sup>13</sup> Rather, it was a chance meeting that set him on the right course. During one of his "Walks after

Insects" he became acquainted with "a Mr Van Dest the famous flower painter,"<sup>14</sup> who invited him to visit. Abbot was shown "a pattern of the large Net," surely a clap-net,<sup>15</sup> and the artist, who "had been a small collector," gave the young man "some rare Insects." Abbot recalled that after the serendipitous encounter he had "immediately a net made and began to understand keeping them [his insects] better" (N).

## II. The entomological watercolours

Abbot's earliest surviving entomological watercolours were executed in 1766. Although they are not as detailed and highly finished as his work of only a year later, as he was still learning to use the pencil and to colour effectively, they reveal by their content and data (as do several 1767 drawings) that in the spring and summer of 1766 he was taking Lepidoptera with a net, evidently the clap-net suggested by his elder friend. He captured a number of butterflies, including *Anthocharis cardamines* (L.), *Aglais urticae* (L.), *Vanessa atalanta* (L.), and *Melanargia galathea* (L.), and knew at least the vernacular names of some (H17, 19, 20, 21). The 1766 drawings include common moths and beetles, a study of tipulids (H38), and various aquatic insects, as well as spiders and phalangids. Assuming that the text which Abbot would compile from his collecting notes in 1772 to embellish the volume of drawings now at Harvard at least partially reflects original data (*q.v.*), his methods and observations were becoming more sophisticated during this first documented 'season.' He may have been rearing Lepidoptera successfully from larvae; he had obtained a second net for collecting in ponds and streams; he was searching for insects on plants and in dung; and he noticed that one of his beetles (H2, *Geotrupes stercorarius* [L.]) was "much infested with small brown Ticks [mites]." Abbot kept an entomological journal, now lost, which appears to have contained entries dated at least as early as May 1766, when he was fourteen.<sup>16</sup> The painter "Van Dest" was his only known mentor at the time, but he may also have been stimulated to try more varied methods and to keep dated records of his collecting and rearing activities by the information contained in his copy of Albin's book, which he claimed was of "great use" (N). Probably the volume was obtained after he met "Van Dest," who could have suggested its purchase, having been a "small collector" himself.

Abbot's artistic work improved dramatically in 1767, and by the end of that year he had acquired much of the skill in drawing and colouring which would lead to his recognition as one of the major entomological illustrators of the watercolour tradition. The evolution was at least partially due to the efforts of a drawing master engaged by the elder Abbot to further his son's education. Jacob Bonneau, an accomplished draughtsman, engraver and painter

whose works were exhibited in London, gave his student lessons at the house in Bennet Street. Abbot recalled that Bonneau "did not paint in Water Colours, he only understood the Rules of Drawing & perspective" (N). Eighteenth-century sources suggest that Bonneau was more versatile,<sup>17</sup> but it is evident from Abbot's statement that however much his drawing might have improved as a result of the lessons, he did not learn his colouring technique from Bonneau. The source of that aspect of his development is still unknown.

In 1767 Abbot's composition was progressing from the relative awkwardness of his early entomological arrangements into more aesthetically pleasing patterns.<sup>18</sup> Although he acquired Albin's *A Natural History of English Insects* very early in his career, only seven of the nearly one hundred and fifty sheets of illustrations known to have been executed between 1766 and 1773 (chronologically, C2, 8, 6, 4, 7, 98, 21; 1769-1772) were in Albin's style, portraying the metamorphosis of various Lepidoptera by depicting a more or less dominant foodplant with its feeding larvae, surrounded by 'cabinet-set' adults, and with pupae either separately delineated or, when appropriate, attached to the plant. These illustrations, the only London drawings to include botanical subjects, easily betray their debt to his copy of Albin, and were not necessarily influenced by the plates of Maria Sybilla Merian, Roesel von Rosenhof, J. C. Sepp, Benjamin Wilkes (in *The English Moths and Butterflies*), Moses Harris (in *The Aurelian*), or others in the same tradition, although Abbot certainly saw some of these books after his introduction to the London naturalists, and may have gained artistic inspiration from them. Abbot would use the style originally taken from Albin for a considerable number of watercolours, including the illustrations of metamorphosis which Smith published in *The Natural History of the Rarer Lepidopterous Insects of Georgia*<sup>19</sup>.

The majority of Abbot's London drawings, those which depict insects without the addition of botanical subjects, exhibit the more tabular arrangements preferred by a number of his contemporaries. Individuals were portrayed in brief series, or, if more numerous, in rows of varying precision. As early as 1767 Abbot executed more geometrical compositions, in which insects were arranged in a pattern radiating around a point at the center of the drawing. A considerable number of his groupings combine tabular and geometrical approaches. All of these devices were familiar to eighteenth-century entomological illustrators, who often used several styles of plate arrangement within a single work to achieve a varied and pleasing effect.<sup>20</sup>

The tabular style of entomological illustration has always paralleled one of the most traditional ways of arranging insects in cabinets. One may argue that this has been coincidental, in that many persons from the seventeenth century to the present have

felt that neat rows were aesthetically pleasing and natural both for plates in books and drawers in cabinets. But tabular arrangements did not always prevail in cabinets of the period of the Enlightenment, and the fact that differing conventions of illustration corresponded to similar styles of drawer patterns suggests that more might have been involved than coincidental concepts of aesthetics. For example, illustrators who used geometrical patterns when depicting insects may have been at least partially influenced by conceits of cabinet arrangement. In seventeenth and eighteenth-century collections, smaller objects such as insects and shells were often arranged in drawers according to geometrical designs. Contemporary illustrations and descriptions indicate that most collectors who chose this approach used simple, symmetrical compositions similar to those seen in the plates of a number of natural history books, and since the origin of the geometrical fashion of arranging the contents of cabinet drawers preceded the eighteenth-century works in which such plates appeared, it is reasonable to suppose that in some cases the first could have suggested the second. Perhaps the influence was mutual. A number of European publications described and depicted the contents of some cabinets, especially those of the Dutch collectors, in which more lavish and even fantastic patterns utilized multiple specimens of each of a number of species.<sup>21</sup> Benjamin Wilkes was the only major British entomological artist to produce plates with more intricate symmetrical patterns of insects; in the "Twelve New Designs" (1742 and later editions) he repeated individuals of the same species a number of times,<sup>22</sup> but John Abbot avoided such extreme devices.

Whatever the source of his arrangements, at least one of the traditions of the cabinet obviously influenced Abbot's style. In the London drawings and in almost all of his later entomological work, his adult insects were not depicted in the more natural poses used by some of his eighteenth-century contemporaries, most notably Moses Harris in *The Aurelian*. Rather, they were 'set' specimens, symmetrically expanded and carefully mounted for cabinet drawers. The two styles, natural and artificial, have continued side by side in entomological illustration for centuries, and of course are still with us. All of the conventions adopted by Abbot during the London years, including the varied styles of composition, were used in his later work.

Abbot's English watercolours demonstrate the two most remarkable factors in his development as artist and entomological illustrator; the relatively short time in which his techniques were developed, and the high level of mastery he attained. The 1767-1773 drawings are of uneven quality, but many, even most, can be classed as among the best eighteenth-century work of their kind. The Russian naturalist Andrey Avinoff, who was an accomplished artist and a connoisseur of no mean capacity, owned the set of Abbot drawings

now at the Carnegie Museum, and described them as "among the masterpieces of entomological portraiture . . . on a par with the illustrations of Sepp and Roesel"<sup>23</sup> (or, as James Edward Smith judiciously ranked them, "the admirable Roesel, and the inimitable Sepp").<sup>24</sup> Avinoff praised Abbot's careful attention to detail and effect: "every hook or minutest spine is recorded with astounding precision," and the smallest gnats and beetles are "delineated with microscopic perfection. At the same time the general effect is never neglected. The luster of the elytra and the transparency of wings is never lost by an excess of details. The venation of the smallest flies is never exaggerated in emphasis to the point of losing the general gauzy appearance. Here the artist was in full control of the purposes of the naturalist."

Calling attention to the remarkable precision of Abbot's illustrations of Lepidoptera, Avinoff mentioned "the variety of . . . surface effects of different parts of the wing with coarser and finer arrangements of scales and even . . . the individual elongated scales of the fringes. An artist versed in the technique of watercolor will appreciate the difficulty of preserving the fine light veins on a colored background without using white paint. . . . The vast majority of the figures throughout the plates are executed in 'pure' water color technique, using transparent tints without washes of gouache. The Deaths-head Moth [C17, *Acherontia atropos* (L.)] is an object of amazement in this regard. One peculiar pattern of the front wings of this moth is produced in nature by light scales of different shades and density on a dark background. The same effect is rendered by Abbot without the use of white paint and producing to the naked eye the absolutely accurate and true aspect. A magnification of 7-8 times discloses a most ingenious, uniform and astonishing technique of microscopic strokes of dark tints on white paper showing through."<sup>25</sup>

Avinoff's previously unpublished analysis is of considerable interest. Obviously the engravers who prepared Abbot's later drawings for publication, and the 'artists' who coloured the plates after they had been pulled, could not hope to convey more than a hint of the details and nuances of such work. The problem, which was hardly unique in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, was especially acute in Abbot's case, so much so that those who know his art only from published plates can have no idea of his actual talent.<sup>26</sup>

Curiously enough, the high scientific accuracy of Abbot's entomological drawings has been interpreted by Vivian Rogers as "truly *trompe l'oeil* at its finest in natural history illustration."<sup>27</sup> Art historians and students of the tradition of scientific illustration would disagree, as the purpose of Abbot and others of his kind was quite different from that of artists who practised such painterly conceits as *trompe l'oeil* deception.<sup>28</sup>



## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Ronald S. Wilkinson, "Smith and Abbot, *The natural history of the rarer lepidopterous insects of Georgia* (1797): its authorship and later history," *Entomologist's Rec. J. Var.* 93 (1981), 213-218; Wilkinson, "Nineteenth-century issues of Smith and Abbot, *The natural history of the rarer lepidopterous insects of Georgia* (1797)," *Entomologist's Rec. J. Var.* 94 (1982), 122; Wilkinson, "John Abbot's drawings and notes for a proposed supplement to Smith and Abbot, *The natural history of the rarer lepidopterous insects of Georgia* (1797)," *Entomologist's Rec. J. Var.* 94 (1982), 159-160. Some selected earlier publications about Abbot and his work, arranged chronologically, are William Swainson, *Taxidermy; with the biography of zoologists* (London, 1840), 99-100; Hermann A. Hagen, "Abbot's Handzeichnungen im Britischen Museum und die Neuroptera Georgiens," *Stettin. ent. Ztg* 24 (1863), 369-378; Samuel H. Scudder, "John Abbot, the aurelian," *Can. Ent.* 20 (1888), 150-154, reprinted in Scudder, *The butterflies of the eastern United States and Canada* (Cambridge, Mass., 1889), 1: 651-654; William F. Kirby, "John Abbot, the aurelian," *Can. Ent.* 20 (1888), 230-232; Walter Faxon, "John Abbot's drawings of the birds of Georgia," *Auk* 13 (1896), 204-215; Witmer Stone, "Some unpublished letters of Alexander Wilson and John Abbot," *Auk* 23 (1906), 361-368; Robert P. Dow, "John Abbot, of Georgia," *Jl. N.Y. ent. Soc.* 22 (1914), 65-72; Samuel N. Rhoads, "Georgia's rarities further discovered in a second American portfolio of John Abbot's bird plates," *Auk* 35 (1918), 271-286; Anna S. Bassett, "Some Georgia records of John Abbot, naturalist," *Auk* 55 (1938), 244-254; Elsa G. Allen, "A third set of John Abbot bird drawings," *Auk* 59 (1942), 563-571; Ralph V. Chamberlin and Wilton Ivie, "Spiders of the Georgia region of North America," *Bull. Univ. Utah* 35 (1944), esp. 7-24; Bryan P. Beirne, "Some original paintings by John Abbot," *Lepid. News* 4 (1950), 25-26; Elsa G. Allen, "The history of American ornithology before Audubon," *Trans. Am. phil. Soc.*, new Ser. 41 (1951), 385-591 (esp. 543-549 for Abbot); Erwin Stresemann, "On a collection of birds from Georgia and Carolina made about 1810 by John Abbot," *Auk* 70 (1953), 113-117; Elsa G. Allen, "John Abbot, pioneer naturalist of Georgia," *Ga. hist. Q.* 41 (1957), 143-157; Woolford B. Baker, "John Abbot's Insects of Georgia," *Emory Univ. Q.* 15 (1959), 146-152; Arnold Mallis, *American entomologists* (New Brunswick, N. J., 1971), 3-9; Lucien Harris, *Butterflies of Georgia* (Norman, Okla., 1972), 3-9 and *passim*; and P. G. Parkinson, "Natural history drawings and watercolours by John Abbot, 'the aurelian,' naturalist of Georgia, in the Alexander Turnbull Library," *Turnbull Libr. Rec.* 11 (1978), 26-36. These are of greatly differing merit. Marcus B. Simpson, "The artist-naturalist John Abbot (1751-ca. 1840): contributions to the ornithology of the southeastern United States," *N. Carol. hist. Rev.* 61 (1984), is now in press. Other contributions are mentioned in these Notes. The short-title method is used after first citation. Late in life, Elsa G. Allen attempted an extensive monograph on Abbot, but was unable to produce a publishable text before her death. Her notes and drafts, which should be used with caution because of errors of fact, transcription and interpretation, are among her papers in the University Archives, Olin Library, Cornell University.

<sup>2</sup>Swainson, *Taxidermy*, 99.

<sup>3</sup>Abbot died in rural Georgia, where he had been living in a cabin on the Bulloch County land of his friend William McElveen. The naturalist was buried in the private McElveen family cemetery, which still exists, although Abbot's gravestone has not survived and his precise burial site is unknown. He was alive in April 1840, as a close friend in Savannah, Georgia, wrote on 22 May that he had not heard from Abbot in a month; Augustus G. Oemler to

Thaddeus M. Harris, 22 May 1840, Thaddeus Mason Harris Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston. One of the copies of Smith and Abbot's 1797 book in the Library, American Museum of Natural History, contains manuscript notes about Abbot by a previous owner, "C. B.," taken from a letter of John E. LeConte received on 4 March 1844. LeConte (1784-1860), an American entomologist who knew Abbot well, "had heard from him 4 years ago — He was then 90 years old . . . does not know if he is yet living." The four-year period suggests spring 1840, but Abbot would not have been ninety until spring 1841. Perhaps LeConte erred about the age. Lucien Harris appeared to have more definite information. In *Butterflies of Georgia*, 6, he stated that Abbot "died in December, 1840, or in early January, 1841." Harris (*in litt.*) would not reveal his source.

<sup>4</sup>David E. Allen, *The naturalist in Britain: a social history* (London, 1976), 14.

<sup>5</sup>Letters written by Abbot late in life suggest that he had kept his correspondence, and even some papers brought from London in 1773. He had a number of watercolours, and he is assumed to have kept notes and pattern drawings. After his death, his friend Oemler sought out McElveen, on whose land Abbot had lived: "I desired him to let me have the old man's papers, paintings, colours &c &c at his own price, but learned to my sorrow, that nothing was in existence now, 'the children had used up all'"; Augustus G. Oemler to Thaddeus W. Harris, 14 March 1851, Library, Museum of Comparative Zoology, Harvard University.

<sup>6</sup>The forty-two bound sheets of watercolours at Harvard (Houghton Library, MS Typ. 426.1), on paper, are as arranged by Abbot in 1772; see section IV below. A number are signed, and twenty-seven of the sheets are dated by Abbot (1766-27 August 1772). The figures are chiefly of Lepidoptera and Coleoptera, but specimens of Orthoptera, Hemiptera, Hymenoptera, Diptera and additional orders are depicted, including arachnids and other arthropods. Abbot's notes, which face each sheet as bound, were prepared in 1772, as was his title-page for the volume, "A Natural History of Insects. Consisting of Forty two Drawings, Exhibiting Two hundred and thirty five Figures. Drawn and coloured from Nature. Together with a concise and accurate Description of each. By John Abbot London 1772." The volume was item 695 in Bernard Quaritch's unnumbered *Catalogue of books on natural history* (London, 1912), which had previously been issued in parts. A bookplate records that the drawings were acquired by the Boston Society of Natural History from the Museum of Comparative Zoology, Harvard University, in a 1915 exchange. A later transaction returned the volume to Harvard. The Carnegie Museum set, located in the Museum Library, is included in a bound volume of entomological watercolours on paper. 97 sheets are by Abbot (1-69, 71-77, 79, 81-100; although in a style similar to Abbot's, 80 is probably by another artist). Many are signed. Ninety-five sheets are dated by Abbot (2 April 1767-30 January 1773), and the majority are annotated. His comments concern provenance, collecting and rearing. There are identifications in several later hands. As in the Harvard set, Lepidoptera and Coleoptera dominate, but insects and other arthropods of a number of orders are included. The Carnegie watercolours were purchased at a London sale in 1913 by a Russian bookseller acting as agent for the Russian naturalist Andrey (Andrei) Avinoff (1884-1949). As Avinoff recalled on many occasions, when departing from Russia in 1917 he had to leave his famous collection of butterflies and his extensive entomological library. Reduced to travelling with one suitcase, he chose a single favourite volume, that containing the Abbot drawings. (His collection was later nationalized, and his library was burned in 1919.) While

Avinoff was director of the Carnegie Museum, he placed the watercolours in their present home. For Avinoff see Geoffrey T. Hellman, "Black tie and cyanide jar," *New Yorker* 24 (21 August 1948), 32-47, and Alexander Shoumatoff, *Russian blood: a family chronicle* (New York, 1982). Both accounts mention the history of the Abbot watercolours.

<sup>7</sup>In 1834 Abbot was persuaded by Augustus G. Oemler to write an autobiographical account. "Notes on my Life" was probably never finished. The existing manuscript covers only the period from Abbot's birth to his arrival in Georgia as a young man. Oemler sent the manuscript to another of Abbot's friends and correspondents, the Harvard entomologist Thaddeus W. Harris (1795-1856); the covering letter, dated 27 April 1834, was printed by Dow, "John Abbot," 70. A transcription of Abbot's "Notes" was published by Charles L. Remington, *Lepid. News* 2 (1948), 28-30. Quotations here are from the original in the Library, Museum of Comparative Zoology.

<sup>8</sup>At St. Bene't, Paul's Wharf; *The registers of St. Bene't and St. Peter, Paul's Wharf, London*, ed. Willoughby A. Littledale, Harleian Society Publications, Registers, 40 (London, 1911), 182. The entry identifies the groom's parish as St. George, Hanover Square, and Clousinger's as St. Martin-in-the Fields. The bride was a minor. The elder Abbot's birth record has not yet been located. According to the Law Society, London, he appears in the unofficial law lists, e.g. in 1783, practising at 7, Holborn Court, Gray's Inn, and in 1785 and 1787, in Warwick Court, Holborn. David E. Allen (*in litt.*) has determined that he died in 1787 and was buried on 10 July; Parish Registers, St. James, Piccadilly, 22, Buckingham Palace Road Branch, Westminster Public Libraries.

<sup>9</sup>Ronald S. Wilkinson, "John Abbot's birth data," *Entomologist's Rec. J. Var.* 87(1975), 49-51. The dates are old style, as the Gregorian calendar was not adopted in England until the following year. Since the 1975 paper, the registers of St. George, Hanover Square have been transferred to the Buckingham Palace Road Branch, Westminster Public Libraries.

<sup>10</sup>In 1844 John E. LeConte wrote to a correspondent that "Abbot was a younger brother of Lord Colchesters"; notes by "C. B.," Library, American Museum of Natural History. Charles Abbot (1757-1829), first Baron Colchester, was speaker of the House of Commons, 1802-1817. The erroneous information could not have come from Abbot, who had refuted a similar rumour during his lifetime. Writing to Oemler, he explained that his brother Thomas "was put as a Clerk to an Attorney, & as I heard was a promising young man." He had read no news of Thomas since the end of the American war for independence, but had "no doubt he was not the late speaker of Parliament"; John Abbot (hereafter Abbot) to Augustus G. Oemler, 26 September 1833, Thaddeus Mason Harris Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston. Charles Abbot's lineage is evident; see his entry in the *Dictionary of national biography*.

<sup>11</sup>The original comparison was probably to a viper's bite, but in 1834 Abbot had lived in the land of rattlesnakes for sixty years. According to folklore, dragonflies could 'sting' with their abdomens, a belief which perhaps originated from observations of oviposition.

<sup>12</sup>Ronald S. Wilkinson, *Benjamin Wilkes, the British aurelian* (Faringdon, 1982), 8-10. Although Moses Harris' *The aurelian* (London, [1758-] 1766)

was currently appearing in parts, the preliminaries, which included a section on collecting methods, were not published until 1766.

<sup>13</sup>Abbot recorded that he "had bought Albin's history of the changes of Insects coloured which was [of] great use to me" (N). Albin and the editions of his book are discussed by Arthur A. Lisney, *A bibliography of British Lepidoptera* (London, 1960), 77-82. Albin seems to have been born before 1690, and was certainly dead in February 1741/2; Ronald S. Wilkinson, "Evidence concerning the death of Eleazar Albin," *Entomologist's Rec. J. Var.* 89 (1977), 220-221. Apparently Abbot took his copy of Albin to America, as he wrote in a portion of the notes furnished to Smith but excluded from the Georgia book that "Albin in his Hist. of Insects says he has not painted them of too bright Colours, but like myself he falls much short of the Originals for want of sufficient bright colours . . . I think Albin has merit, considering the time he published his Works"; Abbot, "A natural history of North American insects," f. 90v, James Edward Smith Papers, Linnean Society of London. Abbot was eventually acquainted with Albin's *A natural history of spiders* (London, 1736). He informed Swainson that he intended to execute drawings of Georgia spiders "in the manner of Albin"; Abbot to William Swainson, 20 December 1816, Swainson Correspondence, Linnean Society of London. (Abbot had already completed at least three discrete sets of watercolours of American arachnids, as well as miscellaneous drawings.)

<sup>14</sup>The identity of "Mr Van Dest" has never been determined. Perhaps his name was Van Diest. The Dutch landscape painter Adriaen Van Diest (1656-1704) spent most of his life in England and was buried in St. Martin-in-the-Fields. He left a son, Johan, who painted portraits in eighteenth-century London; *Dictionary of national biography*, and Ulrich Thieme and Felix Becker, *Allgemeines Lexikon der bildenden Künstler* (Leipzig, 1907-1950), 9: 250-251. The Boyd marriage index, Society of Genealogists, London, indicates that two Van Diests, Adam and Jerome, were living in the parish of St. Martin-in-the-Fields in the mid-eighteenth century. Abbot's benefactor may have been a member of the family. The late P. B. M. Allan suggested to the author that Abbot's description of "Van Dest" as "famous flower painter" and entomological collector precisely fits the botanical artist Georg D. Ehret (1708-1770), and that the elderly Abbot might have confused Ehret in his memory with someone else. The idea is worth repeating.

<sup>15</sup>The device is described by Ronald S. Wilkinson, "The history of the entomological clap-net in Great Britain," *Entomologist's Rec. J. Var.* 90 (1978), 127-132.

<sup>16</sup>The notebook was mentioned by Abbot when referring to an imago which "came out 8th Aug[ust] 1770 see Journal" (C59). Obviously he was keeping records as early as his capture of *cardamines* in May 1766 (H17), which he used when organizing and annotating his drawings in 1772 (*q.v.*) His notes may have formed a continuous "journal."

<sup>17</sup>Bonneau (d. 1786) is mentioned in the *Dictionary of national biography*; Thieme and Becker, *Lexikon*, 4: 307; Algernon Graves, *The Royal Academy of Arts: a complete dictionary of contributors* (London, 1905-1906), I: 237; Michael Bryan, *Bryan's dictionary of painters and engravers* (London, 1909-1910), 1: 168; Adolphe Siret, *Dictionnaire historique et raisonné des peintres* (Berlin, 1924), 1: 120; and Emmanuel Bénézit, *Dictionnaire critique et*

*documentaire des peintres, sculpteurs, dessinateurs et graveurs* (Paris, 1948-1955), 2:3. Several of these sources indicate that Bonneau used the watercolour technique.

<sup>18</sup>All but a small number of Abbot's surviving London watercolours can be placed in chronological order by year, and over two-thirds can be arranged in order by year, month and day, with the aid of his own dates of composition.

<sup>19</sup>The "1797" illustrations were actually received by Smith much earlier, as those copperplates which were dated were prepared from Abbot's watercolours in 1793, 1794 and 1795. The style derived from Albin was later used in a number of drawings, especially those sets of watercolours especially designed as "supplements" to the Smith volumes. At least one of the "supplement" sets was meant to be published; Wilkinson, "John Abbot's drawings and notes for a proposed supplement to Smith and Abbot." The publication concerns the Alexander Turnbull Library (New Zealand) set described by Parkinson, "Natural history drawings." Prints made from the watercolours are now being issued in fascicles by the Turnbull Library.

<sup>20</sup>Two of a number of examples are the plate designs in "Dru" Drury, *Illustrations of natural history* (London, 1770-1782), and Pieter Cramer and Caspar Stoll, *De uitlandsche Kapellen* (Amsterdam, 1779-1791).

<sup>21</sup>Surely the best known is the account by Albert Seba and others of his cabinet, *Locupletissimi rerum naturalium thesauri accurata descriptio* (Amsterdam, 1734-1765), with its curious plates. See also S. Peter Dance, *Shell collecting: an illustrated history* (London, 1966), 62-64, plates I and VIII, and his cited sources, as well as the interesting plates in Levinus Vincent, *Wonder-tooneel der Nature* (Amsterdam, 1706-1715).

<sup>22</sup>Wilkinson, *Benjamin Wilkes*, 5-7, and plates I-XII.

<sup>23</sup>Andrey Avinoff to Norman D. Riley, 22 November 1934, Andrey Avinoff Papers, Library, Carnegie Museum. Apparently the letter was never posted.

<sup>24</sup>James E. Smith and John Abbot, *The natural history of the rarer lepidopterous insects of Georgia* (London, 1797), I: ii.

<sup>25</sup>Avinoff's remarks are taken from an undated typed transcript, probably of a dictaphone recording, in his papers at the Library, Carnegie Museum.

<sup>26</sup>The loss was compounded even more by the colouring process. Illustrators such as Abbot, who could not, because of the circumstances of publication, execute or supervise the colouring of impressions taken from the engravings, were often indifferently served. Certainly Abbot never saw any of the engravings produced from his American work, let alone the plates pulled from them. Swainson mentioned "the many inferior copies" of the 1797 work which he encountered; *Taxidermy*, 100. Of course these were not Abbot's fault.

<sup>27</sup>Vivian J. Rogers, "John Abbot, Samuel Wright and a volume of Abbot's watercolours," *Atlanta hist. J.* 22 (1978), 42.

<sup>28</sup>The difference is in the artist's intent. Celestine Dars has characterized *trompe* paintings as "images of deception," rendered to achieve three-dimensional illusion with an intent to deceive the eye; *Images of deception: the art of trompe-l'oeil* (Oxford, 1979), 7. One needs only to view a number of works in the *genre* to appreciate M. L. d'Otrange Mastai's 'rule' that they *must* have been "conceived with the specific purpose in mind of convincing visual delusion"; *Illusion in art: trompe l'oeil* (New York, 1975), 21, which of course was far from the purpose of the realism attempted by natural history illustrators. Martin Battersby has contrasted *trompe l'oeil* with an artistic tradition which is actually much closer to natural history illustration, that which he has chosen to call "magic realism," the use of "a meticulous finish with every detail delineated with the utmost exactitude, the whole composition being in a ruthlessly sharp focus which, when properly handled, conveys an intensity of feeling penetrating below the surface texture to discover the essence of the model whether human or inanimate" — a technique which has been widely used for the depiction of still life, the human figure, and landscapes. In *trompe l'oeil*, as Battersby suggests, such realism is used as a means of heightening the deception; *Trompe l'oeil: the eye deceived* (London, 1974), 19. In *trompe* painting, images are at least for an instant meant to be visualized as natural objects, precisely so that we reach for the fruit or begin to step through the doorway. Natural history illustration serves a different purpose.

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### Daraba laisalis Walker (Lep.: Pyralidae) in 1983

The following two records are of only the second and third known British *Daraba laisalis*. The first *D. laisalis* known to occur in Britain was taken by E. W. Classey in an m.v. trap at Hampton, Middlesex on the night of 5/6 September 1973, which specimen is in the B.M.(N.H.) Also in the B.M.(N.H.) is a single example of *laisalis* from Spain, taken at S. Pedro Alcantara in September 1968 by the late Mr. D. W. H. ffennell. We are indebted to Mr. M. Shaffer (British Museum (Nat. Hist.)) for the information that the larva feeds on Solanaciae, and for giving its distribution abroad as the Middle East and Africa. — EDITOR.

DARABA LAISALIS IN BEDFORDSHIRE. — During a recent meeting of the BENHS, Mr. Chalmers-Hunt identified a set specimen as this species. This particular moth was taken in a Robinson light trap in my garden here on the 30th July 1983 (fig. 1).

I was fascinated at the time of capture by the posture of this insect. It presented a strange picture indeed with its extremely long front legs and its abdomen curled over towards its head like a scorpion (fig. 2). — K. F. WEBB, 2 Kingsdown Avenue, Luton, Beds LU2 7BU, 14.ii.1984.

DARABA LAISALIS IN SURREY. — I took a good specimen of this attractive pyrale here in my m.v. trap on the night of 18th July 1983. It was kindly determined as this by Dr. K. Sattler (British Museum (Nat. Hist.)). — Sir JOHN DACIE, 10 Alan Road, Wimbledon.